



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Articles

CHANGING TIMES – OR NOT

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I read about a church that split. Doctrinal disagreement was at the heart of it. Most in the group were second generation believers. Some accepted the apostles' doctrine, but others did not. Those who didn't followed their culture's ideas instead.

"Where was it this time?" you ask. I confess that ordinarily I would hesitate to say. Spreading such news seldom helps much, especially if there is little chance the people we tell will ever be associated with the troubled church. In this case, however, you can read about it yourself. You probably already have.

The church in question is the one reflected in 1 John. We know they split from John's statement that some "went out from us" because "they all [were] not of us" (1 John 2:18-19; ESV). We know that doctrine was the heart of the problem from his statement that "false prophets [had] gone out into the world" (4:1). We know that culture's ideas were in play from his additional statements that the false prophets were "from the world," were "speak[ing] from the world," were influential in the world (4:5), and took the word of the world over John's (4:6).

John called the heretics "antichrists" (2:18). That's the perfect word for them: they were against (anti) Christ. They would "not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" (4:2-3). Therefore, they would not teach salvation in terms of his incarnation. Nor would they affirm that Jesus' death was atoning (see 1:7; 2:2, 12; 3:8, 16; 4:9-10, 14). What is especially interesting is how John dealt with the problem. He re-taught the truth about Jesus (1:1; 2:13-14, 22-24; 4:9; 5:12).

It is remarkable how the issues of 1 John resemble the contemporary setting where Western Christians face challenges from views our grandparents (or at least great-grandparents) almost never encountered. These views, from Eastern religions and a mixture of multiple philosophies, have thrown many of us off our game. They demand that we look outside the parts and themes of Scripture we mastered to answer the questions that occupied our Western ancestors. Understood against its background, John's letter is one place we can turn to find and intelligibly articulate the answers we now need. To find and formulate those answers will require a serious commitment to a study of things previously not learned or taken for granted.

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